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Opinion: E-nough already!

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by Dylan Tweney, InfoWorld columnist



(IDG) -- Stop the insanity. I'm drowning in a sea of "e"s.

It all started innocently enough. "E-commerce" was an understandable, pronounceable abbreviation for "electronic commerce."

But then people started adding the "e" prefix to one damn thing after another.

IBM started talking about e-business. Hewlett-Packard helped Microsoft launch eChristmas.com and then went on to offer e-Services. Then came an avalanche of e-terms, both literal and poetic: eToys, eBay, E-Loan, eConcert, eMachines, and even eEye.

This e-mania has reached its apex of ridiculousness in the term e-economy. You can almost hear the pundits patting themselves on the back for coining that one.

And yet -- hello? -- this isn't even a new word. Someone just dropped a hyphen into a perfectly good English word -- one that already began with "e," in case you hadn't noticed.

I, for one, have had e-nough.

Yet, as a pundit myself, I have a professional obligation to coin terms. Besides, I want to help shore up the embattled forces behind the "I" prefix, short for "Internet," of course. (InfoWorld, bucking the trend, has long preferred "I-commerce" to "e-commerce.")

Thus, in the spirit of rampant neologisms, I propose that we call the next-generation Internet the I-netnet.

The term I-netnet, of course, refers to the fact that now even the Internet itself isn't immune

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to the disruptive, decentralizing forces of the Internet.

Three recent battles over Net technologies -- the DNS, instant messaging, and Web page annotations -- illustrate the point.

The Internet's DNS, the key to readable Net addresses, has long been administered by a single government contractor, Network Solutions Inc. (NSI). The U.S. government proposed a more open, decentralized system, to be organized by the nonprofit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Yet ICANN is proving itself incapable of creating a workable alternative, and NSI meanwhile remains firmly in control.

In other words, the entire I-net, which ostensibly empowers small companies to compete with the biggest ones, is being held hostage by a single government contractor.

Another I-net attraction is the topsy-turvy farce of Microsoft lashing out at America Online for refusing to make its chat client, AOL Instant Messenger, interoperable with Microsoft's chat client, MSN Messenger.

Microsoft, the champion of openness? Give me a break. At no point has Microsoft offered to open its own chat client to AOL or anyone else -- openness only goes one way here.

On the I-net, "openness" may be nothing more than a verbal cudgel wielded by the public relations groups in big corporations.

And yet, once in awhile something comes along that really does open things up a bit. One such technology is Third Voice, a browser add-on that lets anyone stick virtual Post-it Notes on any Web page, for the whole world to see.

Third Voice has provoked strong reactions. The company and its proponents call the plug-in a powerful tool for free speech. Yet Web publishers are aghast that their Web sites are getting "tagged" by Third Voice graffiti.

Nowadays, when everything starts with an "e," the Web itself almost seems passe. That's why I'm glad there are still new technologies capable of provoking outrage and debate.

[Dylan Tweney](#) is the content development manager for InfoWorld Electric.

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